

The Ghost

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The Ghost

Hey all!

Trying slowly but surely to get back into writing. I've tried writing a lot recently, but it's just not been happening.

I'm very new to Naruto, having only first watched it in January, but I've been plagued by plot bunnies since I did so, and this is one of them. It's not perfect and I'm not entirely happy with it, but I thought I'd share. It's my first time writing for Naruto, so I hope the characterisation's okay!

Synopsis: After their difficult mission to the Land of Waves, Kakashi takes a moment to regard his youngest Genin and deal with the memories of his old team that Naruto brings to the surface.

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><p>"Itadakimasu!" Naruto exclaimed loudly before tucking into his ramen with even more gusto than normal.<p>

"Naruto! How can you claim you like ramen when you wolf it down so quickly you can't even taste it?!" Sakura moaned in exasperation at her teammate.

Kakashi for his part allowed himself a smile at his youngest student's antics.

Team 7 had just returned from their mission to the Land of Waves, and it had been an ordeal that Kakashi hadn't been prepared to put his

team through. He'd also realised that the years since he'd left the Anbu and joined the Academy had made him a little soft " Zabuzza had nearly defeated him after all.

Yes, Konoha's Copy Ninja might be losing his edge, Kakashi mused.

Not just training for these kids then. I'll train them and work on my own skills while doing so.

Kakashi knew they couldn't afford a repeat of the Zabuzza incident.

Following the mission he'd decided to treat his Genins to Ichiraku, but Sasuke was still in a mood with Naruto for beating Haku and had opted to " presumably " go home. Now he was down to Sakura and Naruto who although still being a bit difficult with each other, seemed to be getting along much better following the Land of Waves mission. Sakura had acknowledged Naruto for who he was as a Shinobi and a person, and Kakashi knew if he ran the bell test with them tomorrow they'd pass " Kakashi knew Sakura wasn't about to stand on the side-lines again.

While Kakashi had been lost in thought, his students' conversation seemed to have moved on.

"Baka! Kakashi-sensei's sat right here so this isn't a date! I'd never go on a date with you! You're not Sasuke-kun after all, are you?!"

Sakura growled and hopped down from her stool.

"Thank you for the ramen Kakashi-sensei! See you tomorrow!"

The pink-haired girl ran off down the street and Kakashi looked at the darkening sky. Sakura probably wanted to be home and safe with her parents tonight after such a tough mission. It was a luxury Kakashi hadn't been afforded in life and one that had been denied to his other two students as well.

The life of a Shinobi could be a tough one.

"Sensei. I want another bowl!" Naruto said while huffing and folding his arms.

Kakashi wordlessly waved down Teuchi who took the cue and quickly made another bowl for Naruto. The boy didn't have a stomach " he had a bottomless pit.

As he wolfed down the noodles, Naruto spoke to his sensei.

"She says she'll never date me, but she will one day! Just you wait and see-ttebayo!"

And there it was " the verbal tic that made the temperature inside Kakashi's heart drop every time he heard it.

Every time Kakashi heard Naruto say 'dattebayo' he'd also hear Kushina say 'dattebane'.

As Naruto continued pigging out, Kakashi allowed himself to get lost in his thoughts of the past and of the young boy sat next to him.

Kakashi heart had skipped a beat in shock when Sandaime had told him who'd be placed on his prospective Genin team. Sakura " well he had no real strong feeling about he was honest, but he knew that civilians could sometimes make surprisingly good Shinobi. Sasuke however set alarm bells ringing " Kakashi had known a lot of loss when he was the young Uchiha's age, but Sasuke's loss was on a level Kakashi didn't think many could bear. Yes Sasuke was going to cause problems down the line. Kakashi knew it.

And finally there was Naruto.

He'd kept his concern over being Naruto's J  nin low-key to begin with. Some of his fellow J  nin asked him if he was okay having "that fox kid" around his other two Genins.

If Kakashi was entirely truthful, he was definitely concerned about being in charge of Konoha's famously unpredictable Jinch  riki, but his main concerns weren't about the Ky  bi - they were about what Naruto represented to Kakashi.

He'd seen the boy about town often enough and that shock of blond hair made him stop dead in his tracks every time he'd crossed paths with the troublemaker. He knew Naruto's reputation for causing trouble, and he knew that the boy was considered inept by the bulk of the teaching staff at the Academy.

Kakashi's sensei, the legendary Yondaime Hokage, having a son who was a failure as a Shinobi had struck a bitter chord with Kakashi who knew fine well if Minato-sensei and Kushina had been about that Naruto would have been an excellent student.

Naruto's repeated failure to graduate felt like a personal failure to Kakashi too. This was his Sensei's boy. Kakashi couldn't help but feel involved in some way, especially given how indebted Kakashi was to his J  nin leader. But Sandaime had kept him and the few other citizens who knew who Naruto was at arm's length and they were unable to participate in the boy's life. Every time he'd heard of Naruto failing his graduation exam he couldn't help but feel ashamed for not being able to help.

Despite this, Kakashi had been concerned when he'd heard Naruto had made Genin " he had failed the exam, but then pulled off an A-Rank jutsu like it was a rabbit out of a hat, and Iruka had let him pass. But Naruto was a Jinch  riki " he'd need more than blind luck to survive out there in the world.

It had been around that time that Sandaime had approached him and told him who'd be assigned to him out of the graduates. As Sandaime's choices sunk in, Kakashi had taken to monitoring the three twelve year olds.

Sasuke was as expected " training regularly and in complete silence. No friends. No social life. But as a Shinobi he was showing all the signs that he'd already found his goal " his reason for becoming a ninja. Kakashi suspected it was to do with Itachi, but only time would tell.

Sakura. Oh boy. He'd heard so many good things about this girl, but she spent her spare time literally stalking Sasuke, and when she came across her classmates she could be conceited and hostile, especially towards Ino and Naruto. Kakashi hoped he'd see what the academy saw in her and soon.

Finally there was Naruto, and that was when Kakashi's alarm bells really started to ring. He had no choice but to be Naruto's sensei. He wasn't going to question Sandaime's decision, nor was he going to abandon the boy when he was finally in a position to help him, but watching Naruto was going to be painful.

His concerns had been elevated over the course of the bell test and their subsequent D-Rank missions. And finally in the Land of Waves he'd figured out just why the young boy was having such an effect on him.

If his new team, Team 7 were a reflection of his old team, Team Minato, Naruto was more than that. Naruto was almost a complete embodiment of team Minato.

Naruto's strong will was extremely impressive for a boy his age, and his determination seemed to stem from his father. Minato had been a quiet and gentle man, but his strength of character was legendary. If Minato set his mind to something he would do it. Minato always meant what he said, and he'd always do what he said. For that reason he wasn't one to mess with. And upon hearing Naruto declare that he'd never go back on his word, Kakashi instantly thought of his sensei.

Physically speaking, take away his whisker marks and Naruto looked so much like his father it was spooky. But his eyes, wide and open were all Kushina's. Kakashi could see both his Sensei and his Sensei's wife staring back at him every time he looked at the boy.

In terms of temperament he was very much like Kushina. Kushina had been scatter-brained and boisterous and also just about the happiest person Kakashi had ever met. She jumped for joy at the slightest of things, and it could be comical seeing her loud reaction to events while Minato would stand there all quiet and just a little awkward.

When it came to being a Shinobi though, that's where Kakashi thought of Obito who much like Naruto had loudly proclaimed several times a day that he'd be the greatest Hokage in history someday. But also similar to Naruto, Obito had never shown much aptitude for any type of ninjutsu. Naruto and Obito couldn't throw shuriken straight or wield a kunai properly. Both would barge in where others would hang back. Kakashi had dearly loved Obito, but had also been left immensely frustrated by his teammate's idiocy. In response Kakashi has been dismissive of, and mean to Obito, taking it as far as bullying at times, and going so far as to tell him that he'd only made Ch  nin because of the war. Yet on the day he awakened his Sharingan Obito had been instantly transformed, becoming faster than Kakashi eyes could keep up with, and Obito had ended up saving both his and Rin's lives at the cost of his own.

Obito had taught Kakashi many things, most importantly to always look out for your friends, but also to never underestimate a Shinobi.

Kakashi had been left feeling ashamed for how he'd treated Obito and how he'd repeatedly belittled the boy. Kakashi had caused their animosity — not Obito, and it pained him to see history repeat itself with Sasuke and Naruto. Sasuke didn't talk much at all, but when he did it was quite often to provoke Naruto or to make him feel small. Naruto responded much like Obito had — acting stropky and getting careless.

But as well as Minato, Kushina and Obito, there was also a little bit of Rin in Naruto. Obito had been known for his kindness, often helping old ladies with their shopping or saving cats or walking peoples' dogs, but he could also be snippy and insulting to people without prompting.

But while Naruto's use of honorifics was almost non-existent, and his choice of nicknames for people dubious, and while he could also accidentally provoke anger in many many people, Naruto didn't ever set out to intentionally hurt anyone. His treatment of Tazuna's grandson Inari had shown that. Naruto had been a little tough on the boy, but solely for the kid's own good, and it had been a display that proved Naruto could act beyond his years. Naruto had gone out of the way to teach the boy something positive about the world and had ended up helping Inari solve some lingering issues regarding his late father. While Sakura, Sasuke and Kakashi had felt bad for the boy, they had all done almost nothing, but Naruto had opted to help, and had inspired not only the boy but by extension the entire town to take pride in themselves and defend their home.

In this way Kakashi could see Naruto being a bit like Rin. Rin was unerringly kind to people, but if Obito was acting the fool she wouldn't hesitate to be harsh if she felt it would help him. She'd chastised Obito for his stupid behaviour on numerous occasions. And she'd lost her temper with Kakashi one day for how he was treating Obito. An angry Rin was a scary Rin.

Kakashi had ended up spending a lot of Team 7's time in the Land of Waves watching and analysing his youngest charge, both desperate to find traces of Minato and Kushina, and also desperate to let his ghosts rest. Finding his teammates spirits alive and well within Naruto had initially upset him.

Kakashi had started to think of Naruto as the ghost of his old team. The ghost of Minato's will. The ghost of Kushina's spirit. The ghost of Obito's dream and the ghost of Rin's kindness. To top it all off he was a Jinchūriki just like Kushina (and Rin now that he thought about it), and he'd arrived in the world just as Minato and Kushina had left it in the most tragic of circumstances. Kakashi's old team reminded him of the darkest days of his life, and a catalogue of bitter failures to boot.

But having seen a large spark of potential in the previously hapless Genin, combined with the transformation he'd witnessed in Tazuna's townspeople due to Naruto's actions, there was now a warmth in Kakashi's heart that he'd been missing for a very long time. Maybe Team 7 would succeed where Team Minato had failed. Maybe something would be different this time. Kakashi sensed massive potential in Sasuke, and perhaps even Sakura as well, and Naruto himself embodied the best qualities of his old team.

Now in Ichiraku, as Naruto plonked down yet another empty bowl and

asked for another, he thought about 'dattebayo' again.

No, now there was no reason for him to feel cold at hearing that tic again. Naruto was proof that his old team were in a way still alive and well and living on in the oblivious little boy sat next to him.

Sandaime had told those who had known Naruto's parentage to keep it to themselves until Naruto had either reached twenty years of age or had made J  nin, wanting to ensure that Naruto either had the tools to protect himself, or a mature enough mind-set to deal with knowing his father was the one to make him Jinch  riki.

In the intervening years, most of those who had known who Naruto really was had died, leaving only himself, Asuma, Shikaku, Inoichi, Choza the Sannin and very few others in the know. Now being Naruto's sensei Kakashi hoped one day he'd be the one who'd be able to sit Naruto down and tell him all about his parents. He couldn't wait to see how Naruto would react to finding out his dad was actually his favourite Hokage.

Kakashi was looking forward to it, he really was. After all, there was so much to tell him, and with his parents it was nearly all good.

"Sensei. Why are you staring at me?"

"Huh?"

Blue eyes glared at him in mild indignation.

"I wasn't staring at you. You just happened to be located where my mind wandered to."

The blue eyes now squinted at him in confusion, "Eh?"

Kakashi sighed, "I was away in a world of my own Naruto. I was staring into space."

"Well you were definitely staring at me and it creeped me out, so now you can buy me more ramen!" he broke into a grin.

Kakashi eyed the large stack of bowls at his student's side sighed, "Fine. Another bowl please Teuchi."

It was going to be expensive, this J  nin leader business.

But worth every penny.

End
file.